The following may help:

- Look for opportunities to chat such as in the car or over coffee, rather than trying to set aside a particular time.
- Be willing to listen openly and not judge what they have to say.
- Try not to dismiss their concerns, patronize or assume you know what is best for them.
- If you can’t answer their questions, you may be able to direct them to someone else who can.

Look out for signs that a young person may need more professional help, such as:

- a prolonged loss of interest in daily activities,
- a prolonged change in appetite and sleep patterns,
- persistent self-blame or guilt,
- risk-taking behaviour, such as reckless driving,
- alcohol or drug abuse,
- self-destructive behaviour, such as self-harm, suicidal thoughts or actions,
- withdrawal from friends, hobbies, or school activities.

If they are struggling with grief, consider getting support from a certified counsellor, a medical doctor, a community organization or helpline.

For more information about grief support services on the North Shore, please contact:

Every Day Counts Program
everydaycounts@vch.ca
604-363-0961
everydaycounts.ca

Prepared by the North Shore Palliative & Supportive Care Program
604-984-3743
Adolescence is a time of great change in the life of a young person. Teenagers struggle with issues of identity and independence as they try to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood. When a death occurs, their life can become very difficult.

**Bereavement for Teens**

It is important to give adolescents clear and accurate information at the time of death. They may wish to take an active part in funeral arrangements or to mark the death in their own way.

Unlike young children, adolescents fully understand the concept of death; they know that death is final and inevitable. However, they often have an exaggerated view of their own invulnerability – ‘it will never happen to me’. As their life goals and dreams start coming into focus, the concept of death can appear both threatening and remote.

Grief in teens may show itself as:
- confusion
- withdrawal
- crying
- feelings of emptiness
- loneliness
- disturbances in sleep and eating
- exhaustion

It can be difficult to separate grief from what is normal adolescent behaviour. Sometimes you can only tease this out by talking with them. It is important they have a caring adult who is willing to listen and validate their loss.

**Possible Thoughts of a Bereaved Teen**

- Is there something wrong with me for feeling like this?
- I don’t want to get upset because people will think I am acting like a kid.
- I don’t want people to pity me.
- I don’t want my friends to treat me differently.
- I feel bad because I was not getting along with the person I lost.
- How will this affect my life and my plans?

Most teens struggle with their parents over chores, responsibilities, and going out. When a parent dies, they can be left with feelings of guilt about this. It can be confusing to feel sad, embarrassed, angry, and resentful all at the same time.

Teens may resent that their lives have been disrupted by death, and then feel guilty for feeling like this. They may have real and valid worries about their future plans. These might include: ‘Can I still go on holidays with my friends?’ ‘Who will teach me to drive?’ ‘Will I be expected to stay home more?’ ‘Will I still be able to do the course I wanted?’

**Supporting a Grieving Teen**

Each young person grieves in their own way so there is no one way to support them. Adults who are willing to listen to teens and model openness in discussing issues of life and death can be a resource to young people.